



# WARATAH-WYNYARD INTEGRATED COUNCIL ENVIRONMENTAL PLAN (iCEP)

## COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION REPORT



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cover photo: Luke O'Brien / Waratah-Wynyard Council

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## ABOUT

This document reports on the outcomes of community and stakeholder consultation undertaken in 2019 for development of the Waratah-Wynyard Integrated Council Environmental Plan (iCEP).

When complete in 2020, the Waratah-Wynyard iCEP will help Council embed sustainability principles into its corporate activities; support the proactive management of the region's natural resources; help the Waratah-Wynyard community to transition and adapt to climate change; anticipate opportunities and mitigate risks for the local economy; and plan for, and mitigate climate impacts on, the built environment.

The iCEP is intended to be an evidence-based plan. During background research for the plan's development, a gap was identified—namely, Council did not have robust data on local community attitudes or beliefs in relation to sustainability, climate change and the environment. A program of community consultation was designed to fill this gap.

## CONSULTATION PROCESS

The objectives of the iCEP community consultation were to understand:

- how the community values the Waratah-Wynyard environment;
- community concerns about the future;
- the preferred role of Council; and
- community hopes for the future.

Community consultation for development of the iCEP was undertaken between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2019. Consultation opportunities were publicised on social media, ABC radio, *The Advocate*, Council's website (homepage and YourSay page), posters, in

person, and at postcard drop-boxes distributed at various locations throughout Waratah-Wynyard local government area.

Consultation was undertaken via:

- an online survey – 140 completed;
- postcards – 88 completed;
- consultative workshop – attended by 11 iCEP 'ambassadors' and two Councillors; and
- written submissions – 15 formal submissions received, plus another five community submissions received.

## KEY FINDINGS

The depth and breadth of the community response to the iCEP consultation—as well as the strength of feeling expressed in many of the responses—suggests Council has a clear mandate to take decisive action on climate change adaptation, sustainability and environmental management.

- A majority of survey respondents said they believed climate change is occurring, and a majority said Waratah-Wynyard is being impacted by climate change right now.
- Only a minority said Waratah-Wynyard Council is currently doing enough to prepare for the impacts of climate change.
- Respondents were very concerned about coastal erosion and the threat of inundation, most notably at Sisters Beach.
- Other matters of concern included: insufficient government and stakeholder action; a perceived lack of Council focus on Somerset; the impacts of development and population increase; threats to vegetation; threats to plant and animal biodiversity; biosecurity risks; extreme weather events and bushfires, and the

impacts of these on infrastructure; the effects of pollution and waste; the impacts of climate change on agriculture; and potential financial impacts.

- Respondents said they wanted Council to demonstrate strong leadership, but to do so in partnership with other stakeholders and the community. They emphasised that the iCEP should be an evidence-based plan and should be implemented at the operational level, not simply remain a high-level policy document.
- Survey respondents rated as 'very important' the following environmental elements: Aboriginal heritage sites; beaches and coastal areas; rivers and wetlands; native bushlands and grasslands; productive landscapes (including farms and forests); plant and animal biodiversity; clean air; open spaces for recreation (including parks and pathways); and Waratah-Wynyard's 'clean and green' image in the eyes of tourists and visitors.
- Respondents also said they valued the accessibility of natural spaces; low population and development; street trees in urban areas; the beauty, diversity and uniqueness of Waratah-Wynyard; the transition between built and natural environments; the natural environment's

contribution to wellbeing; opportunities to contribute environmental values; and high levels of community participation.

- Respondents said Council could do more to mitigate coastal erosion; ensure careful land-use planning, development and building; help residents and industry to be more sustainable; demonstrate corporate sustainability; to manage waste and pollution; prevent the loss of trees and wildlife habitat; manage biosecurity; and mitigate risks to infrastructure.

### NEXT STEPS

Findings from this consultation will be considered alongside other evidence from research. This synthesis will identify key areas for potential Council action.

A review of best and emerging good practice in local government climate change adaptation, sustainability and environmental management will be conducted. A suite of potential actions for Waratah-Wynyard Council to consider will be assessed at a workshop with Council staff in early 2020. These actions will comprise the Draft iCEP.

The Draft iCEP will be released for community feedback. This feedback will be considered in the process of finalising the iCEP for adoption by Council.

# 1. OUR APPROACH

## 1.1 OBJECTIVES

Waratah-Wynyard Council seeks to develop an Integrated Council Environmental Plan that both:

1. reflects available evidence from research; and
2. responds to community and stakeholder aspirations, concerns and priorities.

Consistent with Waratah-Wynyard Council's *Public Consultation Policy*, consultation for development of the iCEP has been informed by the following objectives:

- to understand:
  - how the community values the Waratah-Wynyard environment;
  - community concerns about the future;
  - the preferred role of Council; and
  - community hopes for the future;
- to promote effective communication and consultation between the Council and the community;
- to enable the community to participate in Council planning and decision-making;
- to facilitate community feedback in an efficient and cost-effective manner; and
- to promote Council decision-making that is open, transparent, responsive and accountable to the community.

## 1.2 METHODS

Community consultation for development of the iCEP was undertaken between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019. Postal submissions received by Council in the week following 15<sup>th</sup> November were also accepted.

Consultation was undertaken via:

- an online survey;
- postcards;
- consultative workshop; and
- written submissions.

Participants were self-selecting, and results should not be considered statistically representative. Participants were able to provide feedback via more than one method.

### A) ICEP COMMUNITY SURVEY

The online iCEP community survey was developed using the SurveyGizmo software platform. To enable comparisons with national-level data, some questions were informed by the content of Australian surveys. The survey was available online between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019, and was optimised for desktop, tablet and smartphone.

The survey link was hosted on the Council 'YourSay' webpage and was promoted via an article in *The Advocate* as well as Council's Facebook page. The survey link was also printed on the postcards (see below).

140 surveys were submitted to Council. Of these, 101 were deemed 'complete' (every question answered), and a further 39 surveys were 'partial' (one or more questions not answered).

After submitting the survey, respondents were given the option to provide their details to enter a draw to win one of three prize packs.

Findings from the Community Survey are presented in Section 3 of this report.

### B) POSTCARDS

Council recognises that some community members may experience barriers to

completing an online survey. Such individuals may include children or older people, people unable to access or comfortably use a computer, or people with lower literacy levels.

To widen opportunities to participate, a postcard option was designed and printed on recycled card. The postcard featured a brief overview and instructions on one side. The other side was left blank, captioned with the question: 'Using words and/or pictures, please use the space below to tell us your concerns or hopes for the future of Waratah-Wynyard in a changing climate'.

430 postcards were distributed. Postcards were distributed at each drop-box (see below), direct to schools (including 180 to Wynyard High School, on request), via iCEP 'ambassadors' (see next section), via councillors and the Mayor, and directly to the public during street engagement (see below).

Respondents were invited to submit their postcard via post, via email, direct to Council or at designated drop-boxes. Drop-box locations included:

- Wynyard High School;
- Yolla District High School;
- Boat Harbour Primary School;
- Somerset Milk Bar;
- Sisters Beach Store;
- Wynyard Council Office;
- Waratah Council Office; and
- Wynyard Library.

Respondents were also invited to give permission for their card to be scanned and featured in the iCEP document.

The consultation plan originally included an iCEP street event and barbecue, scheduled to take place in Wynyard town centre on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November between 11am-2pm. This event was intended to raise awareness of the iCEP and provide additional opportunities

for community members to complete and submit a postcard.

Unfortunately, this event was cancelled due to inclement weather. Instead, Council staff members conducted a street engagement activity on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> November in which they visited different locations, talked with community members and invited them to complete and submit a postcard on the spot. Locations were as follows:

- Sisters Beach Store, 9:30-10:30;
- Boat Harbour beachfront, 11:00-12:00;
- Wynyard, near Civic Car Park, 1:00-2:00; and
- Somerset Main St, 2:00-3:30.

88 completed postcards were submitted to Council. The contents of this feedback are presented in Section 4 of this report.

### C) CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOP

At the inception of the iCEP project, Council invited members of the public to register their interest in supporting the project more directly. 32 individuals registered their interest.

Registered individuals were invited to take part in two Council-facilitated 1-hour workshops. The first workshop was held on 15<sup>th</sup> October. Approximately 15 individuals attended this workshop, where they were briefed about the project and invited to support community engagement as informal iCEP 'ambassadors' who might spread the word about the project and distribute postcards.

The second workshop was facilitated by Council on 6<sup>th</sup> November. This was a consultative workshop. 11 participants two Councillors were invited to brainstorm their responses to a selection of questions derived from the survey and postcard.

Findings from the consultative workshop are presented in Section 5 of this report.

## D) WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

With input from the iCEP Steering Committee, the project identified 77 potential stakeholders representing a diverse range of interests and spanning the public, community, industry, education and business sectors. The full list can be viewed at Section 6 of this report. Stakeholders on this list were contacted via letter and invited to make a formal submission to the iCEP development.

15 formal submissions were made to Council via email and post. Unless the submitter requested their response remain private, these submissions are reproduced in full at Section 6 of this report. A further five informal submissions were also made to the project by other members of the public, and these are summarised in the same section.

## 1.3 PUBLICITY

The iCEP consultation was publicised via the following channels:

### LOGO DEVELOPMENT

Prior to beginning the consultation, Council invited Year 7 students from Wynyard High School to submit their designs for the official iCEP logo. The students were Sophie, Ivan, Jack, Bekk, Jackson, Jack, Zeb, Isaac, Logan, Shane, Tyler, Ruby, Kailan, Kayley, Chloe, Kobi, Ciara and Shanyssa. Shanyssa Faber's submission was selected as the winning design by the iCEP Steering Committee for the way it echoed the colours of Waratah-Wynyard's coasts and landscapes, and for its reflection of Council's own brand.

### COUNCIL 'YOURSAY' WEBPAGE

During the consultation period Council's YourSay page featured an overview of the project and a link to the online community survey. The page also publicised the postcards.

## THE ADVOCATE

Council produced a press release on 1<sup>st</sup> October, and this was followed by a feature article in local newspaper, *The Advocate*, on 2<sup>nd</sup> October. The article featured Mayor Robby Walsh (see Appendix).

### ABC RADIO

Local ABC Radio interviewed Mayor Robby Walsh about the iCEP project on 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

### POSTERS

Council produced posters to advertise the iCEP consultation and the planned street event (see Appendix). Posters were put up in the following locations:

- Boat Harbour General Store;
- Kymmies Takeaway, Wynyard;
- Rick's IGA Xpress, Somerset;
- Surreal Hair Designs, Wynyard;
- Warawyn Early Learning Centre, Wynyard;
- Waratah Council Office;
- Waratah Post Office;
- Wynyard Council Office; and
- Noticeboard in Civic Park, Wynyard.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

During the engagement period, Council posted the following notices to its Facebook page (see Appendix):

- 01/10: Notice: help Council create iCEP through the online survey, postcard or by attending the street event;
- 23/10: Notice: help Council create iCEP by completing the survey;
- 06/11: Event listing: iCEP street event
- 08/11: Event cancellation: street event cancelled due to weather forecast;
- 11/11: Notice: street event cancelled due to poor weather; advice about where Council volunteers may be found during the alternative 'walk the streets' engagement.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

### 2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

A majority of survey respondents rated as 'very important' the following environmental elements:

- **Aboriginal heritage sites;**
- **beaches and coastal areas;**
- **rivers and wetlands;**
- **native bushlands and grasslands;**
- **productive landscapes (incl. farms and forests);**
- **plant and animal biodiversity;**
- **clean air;**
- **open spaces for recreation (incl. parks and pathways); and**
- **Waratah-Wynyard's 'clean and green' image in the eyes of tourists and visitors.**

Of the elements listed above, the highest ratings went to beaches and coastal areas, rivers and wetlands, native bushlands and grasslands and plant and animal biodiversity, with 90% or above of respondents rating them as 'very important'.

Text-based responses via the survey, postcards, workshop and written submissions reinforced the above, and also noted the following qualities of Waratah-Wynyard:

- the **accessibility** of natural spaces (including national parks) both within and beyond Waratah-Wynyard;
- the relatively low concentration of population and associated **low impacts of development** and industry;

- **street trees** in urban areas;
- the **beauty** of Waratah-Wynyard's natural landscapes, parks and towns;
- the **diversity** of Waratah-Wynyard's landscapes, including its mix of agricultural and natural landscapes;
- the **uniqueness** of Waratah-Wynyard in a global context;
- the **transition** between built and natural/park environments;
- the natural environment's **contribution to wellbeing**, both physical and psychological;
- existing and potential **opportunities to contribute** to improving and maintaining environmental values; and
- the high levels of **community ownership and participation.**

### 2.2 ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

A large minority (45%) of survey respondents felt the condition of the Waratah-Wynyard **natural environment was getting worse**. One quarter (25%) said it was staying about the same, and 21% said the natural environment was improving.

**Most (91%) respondents agreed that climate change is occurring**, a higher percentage than the Australian general population (77%) (Climate of the Nation 2019<sup>1</sup>). Opinions were divided on the cause of climate change, with

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<sup>1</sup> Merzian, R., Quicke, A., Bennett, E., Campbell, R. & Swann, T., 2019, *Climate of the Nation 2019: Research Report*, The Australia Institute, Canberra

just over half (53%) agreeing it is caused by humans, and just under half (44%) agreeing it is caused by both natural and human causes.

Consistent with the Australian general population, most iCEP survey respondents **think climate change impacts are occurring now**. Most respondents (between 60% and 70%) agreed the climate change is 'already causing' more extreme weather events like storms and floods; rising sea levels threatening our coastal communities; more bushfires; and more heatwaves and extremely hot days. In addition, between 40% and 60% of respondents agreed that climate change is 'already causing' animal and plant species becoming extinct; negative impacts on crop production and food supply; and an increase in biosecurity hazards. Just under half (49%) agreed climate change was 'likely to cause' water shortages in our towns.

Text-based responses via the survey, postcards, workshop and written submissions reinforced the above, and also noted the following concerns:

**Insufficient government and stakeholder action**, especially with regard to governments' lack of forward planning and decisiveness; poor understanding of key issues; the slow speed of government reaction; insufficient resourcing; insufficient attention to risk management; and the prevalence of reactive/self-interested decision-making over evidence-based decision-making. While most comments about the iCEP project were supportive, some respondents expressed scepticism about Waratah-Wynyard Council's willingness to engage with the community and to adequately resourcing and implementing the iCEP.

**Current coastal erosion and the likely future impacts of inundation** were a concern for many respondents. Feedback emphasised **erosion at Sisters Beach**. Other coastal assets

identified as being at risk from erosion and inundation included the Somerset foreshore, highway, bridges, coastal reserves, estuaries and Wynyard township. Concerns related both to sea-level rise and storm events.

In addition to the strong concerns expressed by the Sisters Beach community, there were concerns that **Somerset is not sufficiently prioritised** in Council decision-making, despite matters of concern including maintenance of parks and walking tracks, playgrounds, beaches and streetscapes.

The potential for **overdevelopment and inappropriate development** was a concern. This was especially so in regard to the potential economic and social impacts of building in high-risk locations (e.g. from bushfire, flooding, coastal inundation); the impacts of increased development on water and other resources; maintaining recreation and transport links; keeping the existing small-town amenity and impacting the quality and extent of natural environments. In part, concerns about potential overdevelopment were associated with **concerns about population increase**, particularly with relation to the potential for climate migration from the mainland.

Respondents expressed concern about **threats to vegetation**, including from land-clearing, removal of native species and failures to adequately revegetate landscapes. Concern was expressed that critically important/older trees (which are more likely to provide habitat) were not adequately protected.

There was also an associated concern about **threats to plant and animal biodiversity**, through mechanisms such as land-clearing, habitat loss, increased impacts from humans and dogs/cats, poor understanding of the value of biodiversity, the pollution of waterways, and species change in marine environments.

Similarly, concerns about **biosecurity risks** included invasive weeds and pests, diseases and disease vectors. Concerns were expressed about a range of environments, including roadside management as well as the removal of native vegetation, which allows invasive species to take hold.

**Extreme weather events and bushfires** were named as concerns in terms of their impacts on both natural environments (damage to soil, plant species) and built environments. Associated with this was a concern about the potential **impacts on infrastructure**. It was noted that infrastructure is vulnerable to the impacts of fire and sea-level change.

**Pollution and waste** were named as concerns, particularly regarding pollution and agricultural run-off in the waterways, vehicle emissions and the impacts of plastics in rivers and marine environments.

Respondents were concerned about the **impacts of climate change on agriculture**. This concern extended to the issue of food security and the need to balance food production with revegetation.

The potential **financial impacts** of climate change, especially regarding insurance, were also named as a concern.

## 2.3 PREFERRED ROLE FOR COUNCIL

When asked who should lead action on the causes and effects of climate change, the top three responses from survey respondents were the **Federal Government, state/territory governments and local governments**. These findings differ slightly from nationally held views that the main responsibility to lead

action on climate should rest with the Federal Government, state/territory governments, global alliances and energy companies.<sup>2</sup>

Amongst iCEP survey respondents, only a **minority (17%) felt Waratah-Wynyard Council was currently doing enough** to prepare for the impacts of climate change. This percentage is similar to the 20% of Australians who in 2019 felt governments (at all levels) were doing enough.<sup>3</sup>

Respondents affirmed that local government **should take multifaceted action** on climate and sustainability, with a majority agreeing that these actions should include monitoring and reporting on environmental matters; helping communities to adapt to change; lobbying other levels of government; partnering with others on environmental initiatives; delivering Council services sustainably and helping to keep the community informed.

While some respondents expressed doubts or suspicion about the iCEP, most comments about the iCEP initiative were positive. Respondents said they wanted Council to **demonstrate strong leadership** around sustainability, environmental management and climate change adaptation. Several respondents were keen for Council to officially declare a climate emergency. At the same time, it was emphasised that any Council action should **educate, consult, involve and engage the community**.

It was also recognised that **Council should not and cannot act alone**. Most survey respondents agreed that—in addition to all levels of government—individuals and households, global partnerships, energy companies and not-for-profit organisations should also lead action on the causes and

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<sup>2</sup> Merzian, R., Quicke, A., Bennett, E., Campbell, R. & Swann, T., 2019, *Climate of the Nation 2019: Research Report*, The Australia Institute, Canberra

<sup>3</sup> Merzian, R., Quicke, A., Bennett, E., Campbell, R. & Swann, T., 2019, *Climate of the Nation 2019: Research Report*, The Australia Institute, Canberra

effects of climate change, with a large minority (47.5%) also nominating the business sector. Respondents acknowledged the limits of Council resources. They felt Council's role should include lobbying for additional resources and collaborating with multiple stakeholders, including local environmental and community organisations, higher levels of government and industry stakeholders. Respondents said this role should include a commitment to ongoing community engagement.

The community consultation identified several areas for Council action. Consistent with the concerns described above, there was strong desire for Council to **act decisively on coastal erosion and the threat of inundation.**

**Careful land-use planning, developing and building** practices were all named as potential means to achieve sustainability, environmental management and climate change preparedness. Respondents felt that planning, development and building should be undertaken strategically, with a view to preserving the natural environment, encouraging greenery, facilitating energy and water efficiency, and mitigating risk from bushfire and inundation. Respondents' concerns about population also suggests a role for Council in anticipating and managing the speed and scope of any future growth of urban areas.

Respondents felt Council could do more to **assist residents to live sustainably** and with a smaller carbon footprint. This includes helping residents to implement energy-saving initiatives and plan for reduced water availability. Respondents also wanted Council to support the **sustainability of other sectors, such as farming**, through information-sharing and support for innovation.

Respondents saw an opportunity for Council to demonstrate leadership around **corporate**

### **sustainability and energy alternatives**

through actions such as converting Council buildings to solar energy, adopting recyclable materials in road/pavement work, sustainable procurement policies, retrofitting buildings for increased efficiency, prioritising electric fleet vehicles and lobbying higher levels of government for more local energy options. Other potential actions included supporting the community to transition to electric vehicles and decreasing car use through providing more options for walking, public transport and biking.

More **sustainable pollution and waste management** practices were also highlighted as an area for Council action, including reducing impacts from non-recyclable waste (including plastic bags); incentivising sustainable choices (e.g. reusable rather than single-use products); encouraging and supporting recycling for households and in public spaces; the collection and reuse of green waste; and working closely with industry to ensure system compliance (e.g. around effluent management).

Respondents felt Council could play a greater role in **preventing the loss of trees and wildlife habitat** and in revegetating public and private land. Respondents felt Council could be doing more through its planning role and via partnerships to ensure habitats and green spaces are preserved and replaced. This includes achieving a balance between diverse agricultural/horticultural production and forest plantations. It was also felt that Council could do more to support revegetation on both private and public land, including provision of street trees.

Respondents felt Council has a role to play in **managing biosecurity**, including invasive weeds (both by planting alternative native species and by reducing weeds), pests and disease. It was noted that weed management

controls can have negative health and environmental impacts.

The risk posed to infrastructure was noted in relation to both bushfire and sea-level change, with respondents highlighting a need to **mitigate risk to infrastructure** through reinforcement and relocation, and through planning for potential infrastructure failures in the future.

In addition to the issues discussed above, respondents wanted Council to **ensure decision-making is evidence-based** and not subject to distortions of facts or pressures from vested interests. Respondents felt decision-making should take a long-term view of sustainability.

## 2.4 AN IDEAL WARATAH-WYNYARD

Respondents to the community consultation provided an extraordinarily rich and detailed vision of their ideal future Waratah-Wynyard environment. Readers of this document are encouraged to view these verbatim comments in full (see question 9 of the community survey, plus some of the postcard responses).

In summary, the main themes relating an ideal Waratah-Wynyard were:

- Council displays innovation and leadership around sustainability and climate change adaptation;
- Council decision-making uses an environmental 'lens';
- a forward-thinking Council works in partnership with an engaged community (including with young people and community groups such as Landcare);
- existing environmental and lifestyle values are maintained and protected;
- population increase is neutral/sustainable, and future urban growth is carefully considered;
- natural environments are protected from the impacts of development, tourism and pollution;
- native wildlife and flora are valued and protected within sustainable habitats;
- revegetation and regeneration of natural bushland are supported;
- biodiversity and diverse ecologies are protected and enhanced;
- air and water quality is maintained;
- people enjoy good access to natural spaces and national parks;
- local people work together as environmental caretakers;
- industry, agriculture and forestry practices support carbon neutrality/negativity;
- people are helped to compost their green waste and to repair, recycle and re-use;
- negative impacts of forestry and mining are minimised;
- there is balance between the needs of natural, productive and built environments;
- urban expansion is limited and low-impact living is supported;
- assets and infrastructure are protected from the effects of coastal erosion;
- renewable energy and transport options are implemented, reducing emissions and reliance on fossil fuels;
- natural spaces, flora and fauna are free from the impacts of plastics, contamination and other waste;

- built environments (including retail and business districts) are attractive and well cared-for;
- alternative transport options (walking, biking, public transport) connect communities and provide recreational opportunities;
- reserves and spaces for sport and recreation (including biking and walking tracks) are well-managed and accessible;
- households and businesses make good use of technology;
- tourism (including potential ecotourism opportunities) is managed sustainably;
- people enjoy nature and greenery within and beyond townships;
- food security and access to organic produce is enhanced, supported in part by community gardens and edible landscapes;
- people enjoy economic prosperity and sustainable/carbon-neutral jobs/industries;
- economic prosperity does not come at the expense of the environment and community wellbeing;
- people feel engaged, educated and empowered to make sustainable living choices;
- the community is supported to plan for, and adapt to, a changing climate; and
- the community is inclusive, healthy, well-educated and diverse.